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WAR FOOD ADMINISTRATION
Food Distribution Administration
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FOOD MANAGEMENT IN WARTIME
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U. S. Department of Agriculture

By Dan A. West, Chief, Wholesalers & Retailers Branch

Address, Annual American Hotel Association Business Conference
Hotel William Penn, Pittsburgh, Pa., October 3, 1943

A Government representative at an industry conference or convention ordinarily feels called upon to devote a good part of his speech to problems of the industry. It is customary for Government men to acknowledge the contribution made by the industry in the face of huge obstacles, to offer deep sympathy for the operators trying to solve these tremendous problems, and to end with a patriotic appeal designed to inspire continued cooperation.

Today I am going to change the pattern. I want to talk with you about the problems of the Government — specifically, of the War Food Administration. I want you to see the scope of our job, and the difficulties we face. I am even optimistic enough to hope that when I am through you will feel that we are doing a good job.

The War Food Administration's job is that of managing the production and distribution of food in order that our armed forces, our fighting allies, and our civilian population may be supplied with the necessary amounts of essential foods. Ours is the job of securing the maximum utilization of our food resources.

Among the difficult problems which face us are these. How can the production of essential foods be increased? How can labor, containers, and transportation be diverted to those crops most urgently needed? What proportion of our free and manpower should go into the production of livestock?

Production figures for the past few years give an indication of at least partial success in this phase of the management job: The great crop of 1941 broke all production records up to that time. In 1942, American farmers produced at least 10 percent more food than in 1941. In 1943, we expect that even the 1942 record will be broken.

Of course, all during this time there were charges of "bureaucratic bungling" in Washington. Fortunately, the farmers of this country are men of action. Instead of entering into the various food production controversies in the press and over the air, they kept right on working at their job of plowing more land, milking more cows, feeding more chickens and pigs. The results testify to the farmers' contribution to our National food program.

On the distribution side, we also have important problems. One of them is the allocation of supplies between our armed forces, our allies, and our civilian population. Another is the task of maintaining the proper balance between the various uses to which food could be put. Here are some of the questions we must answer: How can we best procure the food needed by the armed forces and Lend-Lease with a minimum of dislocation to the civilian economy? How can we maintain the necessary distributive channels in the face of urgent needs for manpower in the production of guns and planes and ships? Which foods must be rationed in order to insure fair distribution to all consumers?

You will readily see that these are all sub-questions under the major heading: How can we insure the best utilization of the food which American farmers produce?

In all our decisions concerning food management, we are constantly guided by the thought that food is a weapon, and must be used as such. We cannot look upon food as a luxury which people should be permitted to buy in as large quantities as their pocketbooks permit. We cannot expect to continue our traditional consumption patterns in ~~wartime~~.

It is this fundamental concept which has probably been over-looked in some of the comments on institutional rationing. As you know, there has been a great deal of misunderstanding concerning consumption estimates made by Government agencies. Some people have misinterpreted official statements that the per capita consumption of certain rationed foods in 1943 would be about 25 percent less than the 1942 consumption. They have taken this as an indication that each person's consumption of these foods would equal 75 percent of what he ate in 1942. Obviously, the figure of a 25 percent cut is an average. If we could find the mythical "average man," it would probably be true that in comparison with 1942 his 1943 diet would include about 75 percent as much meat, butter, fats and oils, cheese, condensed and evaporated milk, canned fruit juices, frozen fruit, canned vegetables, and dry edible beans.

In order that we may "average out" however, we must realize that those persons who were eating more than the "average man" in 1942 will get less than 75 percent of their former usage of these foods. Under rationing, civilians are given a per capita allowance of certain foods, and each person is presumed to be entitled to that quantity of these foods. In some cases, the ration share may be more than the person bought in previous years, either because his preference was for other foods, or because his purse did not allow him to buy the full amount. In certain other cases, the ration share may be less than the person consumed in previous years.

I think that many of your patrons come in the latter group--those whose per capita share under rationing will be smaller than they bought in previous years. I realize that this might appear to be an injustice unless the concept of the "average consumer" is clearly understood. There has been some demand from the industry for allotments of rationed foods to institutional users on the basis of historical use of foods by these institutions. The answer to this argument was ably supplied by Francis Flood, Assistant to the War Food Administrator, in a recent speech:

"Some who could always afford unlimited selection of unlimited food will eat less now than before. But many, many more of our people are eating more and better food now than they did in peace time. We have always had food rationing--with the dollar as the food coupon. There were always people who did not have enough of these dollar coupons for an adequate diet. These food coupons were unevenly distributed. Some had an unlimited number of food coupons in their check book and others had very few.

"Now the food coupons are distributed more evenly. There are some chiselers, of course, but those who try to beat the game are few in proportion, and the American public will try to keep that number limited. The result is that our total food supply, now larger than ever in its history, is distributed more evenly than ever before, more nearly equal to all."

It is important for all of us to realize that there is a total amount of food available which must be divided among all groups in our population. This is the American way of fair sharing. If hotels were to be given an increased allotment, it would have to be at the expense of other groups. From what groups could this extra food for your customers be taken? Is there anyone in this room who would say that less food should be allocated to industrial feeding operations in war plants? Would you take the food from school lunches? From persons who had low incomes in the thirties and therefore ate less per capita in those years?

It is this latter proposal that some persons, perhaps unwittingly, have advocated in their contention that the "traditional use" rule should apply. If this were followed to its logical conclusion, we could expect that if Diamond Jim Brady were alive today he would be entitled to his customary 4 pounds of meat per meal minus perhaps 25 percent. On the other hand, by this logic, the clerk who formerly ate only 1 pound of meat per week because he could not afford more should now receive only 3/4 pound per week.

Any industry which advocates that its customers are entitled to more food because they customarily ate more prior to rationing is taking a narrow view indeed of the place of food in the war effort. Here we are dealing with a commodity which is vital to the health and efficiency of our people. Because it is vital, it must be fairly shared by all Americans.

So far as distribution is concerned, England's wartime food management has far excelled our own. The average low-income family in England is better fed than before the war, in spite of the fact that England as a whole is consuming less food. Obviously, this is possible only because the high-income families are eating less. Because of an efficient distribution system, British low-income consumers are nearly as well fed as the rest of the population, and far better fed than many American low-income groups.

True, the diet of even the wealthy British family would seem dull and monotonous in comparison with the food which we have consumed here today. Dullness and monotony are a small price to pay, however, for the assurance that the entire population of a country is adequately fed from a nutritional point of view. Recent surveys of thousands of British families in low-income areas failed to disclose cases of malnutrition outside of institutions. Can we in America make the same claim for our own low-income groups?

In the management of the wartime food supply, the Food Distribution Administration must not only make decisions concerning the share which goes to various groups in our population, but it must also make decisions concerning the uses to which certain foods may be put. As an example of the choices which confront us in the utilization of our food supply, let me cite the case of fluid milk. You undoubtedly know that the Food Distribution Administration is inaugurating sales restriction plans in large urban areas, a number of them effective tomorrow. The purpose is to hold the consumption of milk as fluid milk to June levels, in order that more milk may go into cheese, butter, and evaporated milk.

Milk output during 1942 reached an all-time high of slightly more than 119 billion pounds. This year we will probably have about 118 billion pounds. In spite of stories of killing off the dairy cows, the number has actually increased. Production per cow is, however, lower than last year.

With total milk production slightly lower in 1943 than in 1942, we are faced with the fact that fluid milk and cream consumption so far in 1943 has reached the highest level on record. Recently, the consumption of fluid milk has

mounted at the rate of 1 percent each month. On the other hand, production of cheese and evaporated milk has declined, and may be smaller in 1943 than in 1942. Production of butter so far this year has been about as high as last year, but probably would have declined during the last 4 months of this year in the absence of sales restrictions on fluid milk.

In short, with a given total milk production of about 118 billion pounds for 1943, we have to take some action which will insure the necessary amounts of butter, cheese, evaporated milk, and dried skim milk. Otherwise, civilians of this country will literally "drink up the butter"....or the cheese.

The plan to limit sales of fluid milk calls for dealer quotas, which will represent the maximum sales or deliveries of milk, cream, and fluid milk products they may make. Separate quotas may be fixed for deliveries to various classes of purchasers, such as wholesale outlets, retail stores, hotels and restaurants, and homes. As a protection to consumers, dealers will be required to make equitable distribution of their sales.

In those areas where separate quotas are established for sales to hotels and restaurants, you will probably find that your use has been cut below the June levels. The reason for this is obvious; the milk which is sold as fluid milk must be available to children, invalids, and the sick, pregnant women and nursing mothers, and others whose nutritional need for milk gives them first claim upon the supply. Since the vast majority of your customers are healthy adults, it is quite likely that your use of fluid milk will be curtailed.

I am sure that you will agree that this is a necessary wartime measure and that we can count on you to give a thoughtful, meaningful explanation to your customers. We stand ready to help you in the preparation of this customer information through table cards, menu slogans, and the like.

Fortunately, not all of our programs are restrictive in nature. Once in awhile we can give you news of an abundant crop which you can serve in large quantity to your guests. Since mid-summer, potatoes have been abundant. You will recall that we advised your association that hotels should buy and use more potatoes and serve generous portions. Now potatoes have been declared a Victory Food Selection for the period October 21 through November 6. Your association will be supplied with publicity materials, including mats of the Victory Food Selection symbol. If you need additional information, let me urge you to get in touch with our regional or State offices. I hope you will make a note of the dates and ask your stewards, your chefs, and your catering managers to see that potatoes are featured on your menus during that period—and all through the winter, for that matter.

Here is one factor which you cannot overlook if you wish to build good will for your eating establishments. National publicity will be given to the abundant potato crop. Wholesalers and retailers are cooperating in featuring potatoes at reasonable prices. If your customers find potatoes on your menus at high prices, they will feel resentful. Only last week I was asked by an irate consumer why a certain Washington hotel charged 35 cents for an à la carte order of this abundant vegetable. This person's comment was: "Why, the waiters they get nowadays couldn't carry 35 cents' worth of potatoes!" In commenting further on this hotel's practice, the customer said: "I asked for a small order of potatoes, which were listed on both the table d'hôte and a la carte menus. Twice I emphasized to the waiter that I did not want a large order. Yet, what I got was a plate full of potatoes—and at a price which was ridiculous."

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That kind of customer reaction will be intensified by the publicity given to potatoes as a Victory Food Selection, unless prices are reasonable. I know you will want to build good will and, at the same time, do you share in distributing the magnificent crop which our farmers have produced.

You must realize that we are frequently asked to justify to other Government agencies and to the public certain practices of wholesalers, retailers, and restaurant and hotel operators. In many cases, we can readily do so. In other instances, however, we are entirely unable to condone certain wasteful, extravagant practices. When a consumer sends us a restaurant menu containing 294 items and asks us, "Isn't this a wasteful practice in wartime?" we have to admit that it is. Who can justify such wide selections and the resulting food waste?

This leads me to one final word about an important responsibility which rests with you — the wartime obligation to conserve food. I realize that many public eating places do an outstanding job of kitchen management, and to the operators of those places I say, "More power to you." Others, however, unfortunately feel that they must continue the tradition of a bountiful host whose guests must never be denied the gratification of their slightest wishes. In wartime, the waste of food which this involves is literally sabotage and such traditions of the art of fine living must be shelved for the duration.

Let me urge you to examine the practices in your eating places which result in food waste. Do some pioneering in discovering ways to save food. In doing so, you will exempt your operations from public criticism and will create good will. Even more important, you will perform a necessary patriotic service to your country.

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